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AGENDA ITEM 105: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 105: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (A/51/12 and Add.1, A/51/206-S/1996/539, A/51/329, 341, 367 and 454)

1. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), introducing her report (A/51/12 and Add.1), said that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was responsible for more than 26 million people, just over half of whom were refugees, while the remainder were returnees, internally displaced persons and war-affected populations. While progress had been made towards durable solutions in many parts of the world, and there had been a small reduction in numbers of persons compared to 1995, the international environment remained highly volatile, and people had recently been uprooted by armed conflict in several countries. The mandate given to UNHCR by the General Assembly over 45 years previously was as valid as ever before.

2. Both donors and countries of asylum had become increasingly concerned about the cost of providing refugees with indefinite protection and assistance. Refugee movements could threaten national, regional and even international security, and contribute to economic and social instability in the countries of asylum. Nevertheless, she was grateful that many States had continued to open their borders to large numbers of refugees.

3. UNHCR had two fundamental and closely related concerns. The first was to ensure continuing commitment to the core values of refugee protection and, in particular, the principle that people should not be forcibly returned to situations in which their lives might be in danger. There was a dilemma when asylum was abused for political, economic or military ends, but innocent victims had to be protected. UNHCR had followed closely the debate on measures to combat terrorism, which should not be allowed to jeopardize the institution of asylum for persons in genuine need of protection. The second concern was to secure effective solutions to refugee crises. Dilemmas often arose during the search for solutions to displacement problems caused by bitter and divisive conflicts, when there was often no political will to initiate and sustain true reconciliation.

4. The Great Lakes region of Africa provided an illustration of the complex challenges to be faced. There was a clear link between the humanitarian, political and security crises in eastern Zaire, and lack of progress in repatriating Rwandan refugees had exacerbated tensions. Before the most recent wave of violence had erupted, the camps in the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire had contained some 1.6 million Rwandans, an explosive mixture of innocent refugees, intimidators, militants and perpetrators of genocide. With the renewed fighting, hundreds of thousands of refugees and Zairian civilians were once again fleeing for their lives. UNHCR had no access to well over half a million refugees, and was facing another humanitarian catastrophe. Steps to contain the crises should include the immediate negotiation of a ceasefire in order to permit access to refugees, provide assistance and protect the security of humanitarian aid workers. In the mid-term, the political roots of the violence must be addressed in order to make the difficult transition to

reconciliation and lasting peace. Only a major and fully sustained political settlement could bring the catastrophe to an end.

5. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina also illustrated the challenges of refugee repatriation and reconciliation. A quarter of a million people, mostly internally displaced persons, were estimated to have returned to or settled in areas where their group was in the majority. Returns across the different entity lines had been few and were beset by serious obstacles. It must be recognized that people had the right to return to their homes and that there was a need to search for alternative solutions regionally or within the country. Those unable to return safely to their home areas should not be forced to do so. She was disappointed at the repeated postponement of the planned municipal elections, which could have provided vital opportunities for reconciliation and confidence-building. It should be clearly indicated to the parties involved that the international community expected them to abide by the commitments made in the Dayton Agreement. It would not be possible to provide indefinite support to authorities which consistently opposed her Office's humanitarian mission.

6. Despite the difficulties in the Great Lakes region and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, progress had been made in other parts of the world. Since 1994, some 3 million refugees had returned to their countries. In Mozambique, the peaceful reintegration of 1.7 million refugees had permitted UNHCR to end its operations there. Similarly, the Comprehensive Plan of Action for Indo-Chinese Refugees had also been successfully concluded after two decades. Mexico's decision to offer Guatemalan refugees in Mexico the possibility of integration meant that a solution was in sight for the last remaining refugee problem in Central America.

7. Such successes had shown that political, economic and humanitarian initiatives could be interwoven to support and sustain the reconciliation process, but the question remained how best to ensure that the lessons learned could be applied in other regions. Real progress towards peace was usually a precondition for solving refugee problems. Although the political will of those directly involved was the most important factor in peace, international involvement could also play an important role. She therefore renewed her appeal for increased international support for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Liberia, in order to end the predicament of the three quarters of a million Liberian refugees.

8. Countries traumatized by conflict needed help in order to make the complicated transition from war to peace and development. Many refugees were returning to countries where the infrastructure had been devastated by years of conflict, and where peace had often not been fully secured. Through its community-based assistance programmes, UNHCR sought to improve conditions, promoting quick-impact projects in order to accelerate rehabilitation. The sustainability of such projects must be ensured, and joint planning and early collaboration among all the international agencies involved could be of great benefit. UNHCR was fully committed to forging close, collaborative relations in order to ensure smooth and timely linkages between relief, rehabilitation and development.

9. While vigorously pursuing solutions for refugees, UNHCR also needed to play a role in averting unnecessary displacement, and to examine with all its partners how best to prevent, manage and solve displacement through comprehensive regional initiatives.

10. Three critical factors would allow UNHCR to fulfil its role in ever more complex environments: respect must be ensured for its unique mandate of refugee protection; a collective commitment to respond to emergencies and resolve humanitarian crises was essential; and it was vital that UNHCR was fully equipped to carry out its mission. It had therefore embarked upon a process of internal reform, called Project Delphi, which should lead to greater delegation of authority to operations in the field, strengthened planning capacity, and streamlined human-resource management. Donors, the heavily burdened countries of asylum and, above all, the refugees, deserved maximum effectiveness and efficiency.

11. Replying to a query from Mr. WESTON (United Kingdom) as to whether it would be advisable to have a single humanitarian coordinator to cover the whole Great Lakes region, she said that UNHCR already had a single coordinator or special envoy to deal with refugee problems in the five countries of the region. The special envoy moved around the region, dealing with problems as they arose, leaving country representatives free to carry on with their daily work. That flexible approach, which it was planned to continue, was seen as the best way of dealing with the problems brought about by movements of people, which could not be adequately dealt with by a single country representative. The special envoy had therefore, ever since the beginning of the Great Lakes crisis in 1994, been dealing with refugee outflow, security matters and repatriation in the five countries concerned.

12. In reply to a request from Mr. AQUARONE (Netherlands) for further details on institutional reform and durable solutions, she said that Project Delphi was the result of an inquiry into how it would be possible to streamline UNHCR. It had been emphasized that many procedures and as much decision-making as possible should be delegated to the field, closer to the refugees. In order to ensure effective decision-making, UNHCR felt that management in the field should have full authority to manage resources as appropriate to the country and the situation. The special envoy she had referred to earlier should have a small team for that purpose. The number of staff at Headquarters would have to be reduced by some 25 per cent, but Headquarters would remain responsible for standard-setting, fund-raising and accountability. A great deal of training of personnel in the field would be required in order to make the system work, and the whole process would take at least two years. Project Delphi would also contribute to the finding of durable solutions by contextualizing refugee problems.

13. In response to a request from Mr. DESAGNEAUX (France) for information on the measures envisaged to encourage refugees to return to their countries of origin, she said that UNHCR, through tripartite discussions with Zaire and Rwanda, had tried hard to promote the safe and dignified return of refugees. Most of the refugees came from Rwanda, and the Rwandan Government had attempted, with UNHCR cooperation, to make conditions possible for return. However although the majority in the camps were women and children, they were being

intimidated by those in power there, and prevented from returning. It would be necessary to close camps or move people in order to break up the power structure of the camps, and that would be difficult. However, one positive aspect of the situation in the Great Lakes region was that people were moving, and that structure was therefore being broken up. When the situation stabilized, ideas for promoting return including improved information systems and better assurances of safety for the refugees upon their return.

14. Replying to a query from Mr. BIGGAR (Ireland) on the situation in Goma, eastern Zaire, she said that the situation there had indeed deteriorated. Some 100 expatriate aid workers were trapped in the town by the fighting, and the airport was not secure for departure. There was concern for those international staff, among whom were 14 UNHCR staff members. There were six large camps north of Goma, but the entire populations of at least three seemed to be converging on a camp in the south-west which already contained a large number of people. Such an enormous increase had serious implications for health and for food and water supplies. If the fighting moved to that area and there was shelling, the situation could become catastrophic. An immediate ceasefire was essential.

15. Mr. HABIYAREMYE (Rwanda) said that his Government had given every encouragement to the refugees in Zaire to return home and would welcome their contribution to Rwanda's reconstruction. He wondered what measures could be taken to remove from the camps those who were intimidating would-be returnees. The crisis in Zaire was an internal conflict between the Zairian army and the local population. As the High Commissioner had stated, the fighting must be halted to enable aid agencies to reach those in need of humanitarian assistance. He asked how, in her view, a ceasefire could be brought about.

16. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that it had proved difficult to separate the refugees from those who sought to intimidate them, since there was no legal definition of what constituted intimidation. Furthermore, given the vast numbers of refugees, the task would be beyond the capacities of the Zairian and Tanzanian authorities. Workers in the field were attempting to prevent blatant military activity in the camps by maintaining law and order and confiscating weapons. They could not, however, stop contacts between refugees and armed militias operating outside the camps. When intimidators were identified, they were removed from the camps by the authorities of the receiving countries. She had recently held talks with the Governments of the United Republic of Tanzania and Zaire, and with the Rwandan authorities to facilitate the repatriation of the Rwandan refugees. When the gradual closure of the existing camps began, any refugees unwilling to return home would be screened by the authorities of the receiving countries and those deemed to have genuine fears would be granted asylum or moved to new camps.

17. Mr. LUKABU KHABOUJI N'ZAJI (Zaire) said that the crisis in Zaire was not due to an internal conflict. The refugees had been driven from their camps by Rwandan aggression. He feared that they would become a human buffer between the Zairian army, which sought only to defend its territory and armed groups abetted by the Rwandans, whose territorial ambitions were well known.

18. The international community had responded impassively to the crisis in the region. The influx of refugees into Zaire in 1994 had led to terrible loss of

life among the local population due to the spread of disease. Two years later, conditions in the camps remained appalling, yet little was done. While firm measures had been taken to halt "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Rwandan Government's exclusion of an entire people from its territory went without challenge, so-called intimidators being held responsible. The role of President Bizimungu in the genocide of 1990 had never been raised. Rwanda had been allowed to lay the ground for its current aggression as the international community looked on indifferently. The United Nations Security Council had even lifted the arms embargo on that country. Zaire had drawn attention to those matters in various United Nations forums but had met with complete indifference.

19. As to the Banyamulenge, if they believed they had been treated unfairly by the authorities, they should appeal through the appropriate legal mechanisms, rather than resorting to force of arms. He recalled that they were not an indigenous people of Zaire, having been transplanted from Rwanda by Belgian settlers.

20. His Government welcomed the Secretary-General's proposal to send an envoy to the region. No such initiative could succeed, however, without the cooperation of all parties to the conflict. Accordingly, Zaire would not participate in the planned regional conference until the withdrawal from its territory of the ruthless killers who, earlier that week, had murdered the Archbishop of Bukavu. He urged the international community to exert pressure on the Rwandan authorities to that end.

21. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) expressed her deep regret at the Archbishop's death. As to the plight of the refugees in Zaire, the scope for action by her Office was very limited as long as the fighting continued. She therefore appealed to all parties to bring an end to the violence. She hoped that the refugees would not become displaced persons in the very country where they had sought a safe haven. She recalled that UNHCR had long been active in the region, establishing an office in Bujumbura in 1959.

22. Mr. REYES RODRÍGUEZ (Cuba), referring to paragraph 15 of the High Commissioner's report (A/51/12), asked what consequences the proposal to interpret more liberally the international refugee instruments would entail and what steps UNHCR had taken to alleviate the burden placed on developing countries by influxes of refugees.

23. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish genuine asylum-seekers from economic migrants. Consequently, the rules on asylum were being applied ever more restrictively. While she acknowledged the need for procedures to detect abuses of the asylum system, she was concerned that some applicants were not given adequate opportunity to state their case. It was vital to help receiving countries deal with the impact of influxes of refugees on their social infrastructure, the environment and national security. In the previous year, through the generous support of donor countries, her Office had been able to raise sufficient funds to carry out all its programmes for 1996. However, it was not possible currently to meet all the needs of receiving countries.

24. Mr. REJN (Belgium) said that, given the extent of the crisis in Zaire, references to history were pointless. As the High Commissioner had said, if further human tragedy were to be averted, the political causes of the violence must be addressed. To that end, the international community should lend its support to the Secretary-General's proposal to send an envoy to the region with a broad mandate to resolve the differences between the various parties to the conflict. The subsequent holding of a regional conference would also be most constructive, and he urged the United Nations to enhance its role as a mediator. It was possible that the fighting in Zaire might force large numbers of refugees to return to Rwanda. He wondered how the authorities of that country would cope with such an influx.

25. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that there were currently 1.6 million Rwandan refugees in camps in the region. The international community must assist the Rwandan Government with the reconstruction of the country's infrastructure in preparation for their eventual return. Her Office, for its part, would gradually increase its activities in Rwanda as the need for assistance in the camps diminished. Clearly, the Rwandan Government would be unable to cope if all the refugees returned simultaneously.

26. Mr. HABONIMANA (Burundi) said he agreed with previous speakers that the conflict in the region had arisen because of political factors. The regional conference proposed by the Secretary-General would provide an opportunity to address those issues. Contrary to the assertions of the Zairian Government, Burundi had played no part in the conflict in Zaire and had no desire to foment unrest in that country. He would welcome the sending of a verification mission to Burundi to investigate the allegations.

27. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) expressed her appreciation for Burundi having provided asylum for Rwandan refugees over a long period, and said that almost all had returned safely to Rwanda. Moreover, in recent days some 3,000 Burundians affected by the fighting in Uvira, Zaire, had returned to Burundi.

28. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica) expressed appreciation for the institutional cooperation among the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in developing global programming guidelines and standards for assistance to refugees, including refugee children. She inquired as to whether the assistance provided to non-accompanied refugee children took into account the particular situation of refugee girl children, and whether special measures of any kind were being taken on their behalf.

29. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that much more attention had recently been focused on the welfare of refugee children, especially of girls, and that intensive collaboration with UNICEF, ICRC and concerned non-governmental organizations had been set up in that regard. As an example of such collaboration, she drew attention to the Bosnia women's initiative, which had successfully empowered women and girl children and enhanced their roles in national rehabilitation and reconciliation. Such programmes would serve as models for future efforts, especially in Rwanda.

30. Ms. MSUYA (United Republic of Tanzania) expressed her delegation's appreciation for the High Commissioner's tireless efforts in providing support for refugees in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

31. Mr. LUKABU (Zaire), in response to the representative of Belgium, said that his country supported the mission of the Secretary-General's envoy to the Great Lakes region to deal with the crisis.

32. Mr. FAREED (Department of Humanitarian Affairs), introducing the Secretary-General's report entitled "New international humanitarian order" (A/51/454), summarized the history of United Nations efforts to establish a new international humanitarian order since 1981. During that time, the Secretary-General had presented eight reports on the topic, and had transmitted to the General Assembly the views of 48 Governments and several specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations. The current report presented contributions from Monaco, Turkey, and the Independent Bureau for Humanitarian Issues.

33. Mr. LEGWAILA (Botswana), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), applauded the work of UNHCR in southern Africa, and cited a recent memorandum of understanding signed by SADC and UNHCR, aimed at establishing a framework for cooperation between them.

34. While the international community had the capacity to prevent the outbreak of conflicts, it would also be useful to hold belligerents responsible for any attacks or abuses perpetrated against civilians and the personnel of relief organizations. The establishing of international tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia were encouraging developments, as were efforts to set up an international criminal court of justice, but it was necessary to provide such bodies with sufficient resources.

35. Citing landmines as a serious obstacle to the safe return of refugees in southern Africa, he appealed to the international community to exert greater efforts in mine clearance for humanitarian purposes. He also called upon States in the region to promote the return of refugees, and said that the sustainable reintegration of such refugees should be supported by providing rehabilitation and development assistance to their countries of origin.

36. Ms. OAKLEY (United States of America) called for a coordinated strategy to deal with the urgent situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa; however, as resources were limited and diminishing, countries of origin and asylum in the region had also to assume greater responsibility.

37. Expressing her delegation's strong interest in pursuing durable solutions, she cited the innovative and comprehensive approaches developed by UNHCR for addressing population movements and said that voluntary repatriation should combine the elements of sustainable development, a community-based approach and a focus on returnee communities. She also expressed appreciation for UNHCR efforts to think through ways to assure smooth disengagements as well as devise comprehensive strategies.

38. The United States enthusiastically supported efforts undertaken pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 to examine the coordination of

emergency humanitarian assistance; it viewed the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as the best existing mechanism to facilitate quick, effective responses to complex emergencies. It was also necessary to maintain and strengthen the humanitarian principle that refugees must not be returned to persecution or torture, either from within a receiving State or from its border.

39. Mr. MUKASA-SSALI (Uganda) noted that solutions for the refugee problems of the Great Lakes region of Africa had been elusive, while the situation there had recently become critical. He commended UNHCR for its attempts to promote cooperative relationships among United Nations agencies, for its concern with hunger and epidemics as special problems of refugee women and children, and for its attention to environmental issues stemming from the presence of large refugee populations in host countries for prolonged periods.

40. Although UNHCR had successfully initiated several refugee repatriation programmes in Eritrea, the Sudan and Djibouti, repatriation elsewhere had been less successful owing to regional conflicts and other unfavourable conditions. The major asylum countries of the Great Lakes region had reached a consensus that voluntary repatriation needed to be accelerated in order to forestall increased tensions in the refugee community. While some short-term assistance had already been provided for repair of damage to the environment and infrastructure of the region caused by the prolonged presence of refugees, the asylum countries were calling upon the international community to provide a more generous response to their needs.

41. Mr. KONISHI (Japan) expressed his delegation's profound appreciation and continued support for the work of UNHCR. Unfortunately, there were many volatile places in the world. Japan was particularly concerned about the most recent developments in eastern Zaire. It was becoming clear that achieving a durable solution to refugee problems required more than assistance and protection. There was a need to develop a comprehensive approach based on the specific characteristics of situations requiring international efforts in a wide range of areas.

42. Japan highly appreciated the Office's work in implementing small community-based projects to pave the way for repatriation and resettlement and its reconciliation efforts to bring about the peaceful settlement of conflicts. Those tasks, however, must be tackled by the entire international community, particularly the United Nations system. While UNHCR could play an important role, for example in fostering an environment conducive to finding a peaceful solution, the primary responsibility for devising formulas for peace rested with the parties concerned and such bodies as the Security Council and regional organizations. It was appropriate for the Office to implement projects that could stimulate economic reconstruction, but full-scale assistance for post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation should be carried out by such organs as UNDP and the World Bank. Conflict prevention was a task for which the States concerned and the Security Council, not UNHCR, must take responsibility. Beginning in 1997, Japan would participate in the discussions of the Security Council on the maintenance of peace and security. His country was determined to contribute to ensuring world peace and stability, addressing matters not only from the political and military standpoints, but also from a wider perspective ranging from humanitarian concerns and human rights to development.

43. Coordination of humanitarian activities in the field could be ensured most effectively by a lead agency with experience based on its activities and a permanent presence. The role played by UNHCR in the former Yugoslavia was the best example of a lead agency taking responsibility for such coordination. Japan highly appreciated the Office's initiative in implementing the quick-impact project to launch the initial phase of the rehabilitation process. Assistance for full-scale rehabilitation, however, should be undertaken swiftly by development agencies in close coordination with UNHCR. An effective coordination mechanism was therefore essential.

44. Japan highly commended the High Commissioner for the bold reform initiative and strongly supported the direction in which UNHCR was moving, although the details and final implications of the reform project needed to be studied. He also stressed the need to ensure the security of personnel engaged in humanitarian assistance, inter alia, by bringing into effect the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel as quickly as possible.

45. Mr. DAVID (Israel) said that, since its establishment, Israel had been a country of immigrants and a haven for refugees. Successive Israeli Governments and citizens had taken extraordinary steps to assist the absorption of immigrants. His country had acceded to numerous international conventions on refugees and had increased its participation in United Nations humanitarian aid missions in such places as northern Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi and Angola. The desire to assist refugees had led to Israel's decision to absorb into its own society 'boat people' from Viet Nam as well as Muslim refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Israel was determined to continue to contribute to the welfare of refugees both nationally and internationally, foster international cooperation, provide assistance, and share its experience and learn from other countries' experiences for the benefit of refugees worldwide.

46. Mr. AGGREY (Ghana) said that a humanitarian tragedy of unimaginable proportions was taking place in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Massive refugee flows were also occurring in other parts of the world. The time had come for the international community to examine the mandate of UNHCR and the tools made available to the Office to enable it to cope with the recent spate of complex emergencies and the problem of internally displaced persons. One possible approach would be the elaboration of a declaration of guiding principles of international law reflecting developments in refugee law in particular and international humanitarian law in general, as well as the experience of UNHCR and related agencies in the field. It was in the enlightened self-interest of all States to address refugee issues in a comprehensive manner in order to ensure collective security.

47. The Office could not be expected to cope with the situation alone, especially when the volume of the refugee flows and the complex nature of their causes called for a multi-pronged, comprehensive response. It was clear from the situation in the Great Lakes region that the unchecked proliferation of arms in the refugee camps and the massive economic, social and environmental damage and psychological trauma had to be dealt with by the international community as a whole.

48. His delegation appreciated the good work being done by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee under the auspices of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. In that connection, Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/56 on the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance was a welcome initiative. It should improve coordination between relief, rehabilitation and development for the countries and peoples concerned, especially in post-conflict reconstruction.

49. Mr. ABOUL-MAGD (Egypt) commended the High Commissioner's accomplishments, which had been achieved with slender resources. Conflicts were frequently complex and tended to spill over political boundaries, generating humanitarian problems that had to be addressed regionally, with coordination between Governments and United Nations bodies. Strategies tailored to specific situations and quick-impact projects constituted a promising approach.

50. A third of the world's refugees were to be found in Africa, and almost half of UNHCR's resources - which were dwindling even as its burden of work increased - were spent there. He urged the international community to back UNHCR by contributing generously in pledging conferences. In the Great Lakes region, notably, the problem involved not only humanitarian but also political, economic and social aspects. The principle of voluntary return was crucial; host States must not adopt coercive measures. The fact remained that those States were paying a heavy price in terms of both their economic and environmental resources and their stability and security.

51. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that UNHCR was still playing a coordinating role in the rehabilitation of refugees under the Dayton Agreement. The return and compensation of those and other refugees, including the Palestinian refugees, should continue to be a priority issue for the United Nations.

52. Mr. dos SANTOS (Mozambique) said that in June 1996 his Government and UNHCR had concluded the repatriation and resettlement of about 1.7 million Mozambicans who had sought refuge in neighbouring countries. That programme, which was regarded as the largest and most successful operation undertaken under UNHCR auspices, had been made possible by the strong desire of the refugees to return to their country and the positive role played by the international community. Mozambique attached great importance to the solidarity that it had received from all neighbouring countries during the years of conflict and uncertainty. It was hoped that the lessons learned from the successful Mozambican voluntary repatriation and reintegration operation would encourage other countries to address similar problems. Mozambique had developed significant national capacities and trained experts that could be utilized in that field anywhere in the world.

53. Nevertheless, his Government continued to resettle and reintegrate internally displaced persons, demobilize soldiers and improve the living conditions of the newly arrived population. Those efforts should be supported by the international community as Mozambique strove to heal the wounds of war and enhance the living standards of all its people. It was equally important to continue to provide assistance for mine clearance in Mozambique in order to consolidate peace and encourage people to return to their places of origin and resume farming. The establishment of a national mine-clearance capacity was of

paramount importance for Mozambique and should be at the top of the agenda for assisting countries emerging from major conflicts.

54. Mr. LAKATOS (Hungary) said that human rights could not be considered an exclusively internal affair of any State and that Governments should be held accountable for violations of international human rights standards and for bringing to justice those who committed serious human rights violations. The problem of refugees could be solved only through comprehensive and integrated responses addressing the root causes of conflicts, including an appropriate human rights policy. Mechanisms for enhancing refugee protection and assistance must be closely coordinated with mechanisms for preventive diplomacy. The role of UNHCR could not, however, substitute for governmental responsibility in ending violations of humanitarian law.

55. Prevention was the most effective way to protect people in danger of becoming refugees. Preventive human rights actions might prevent the collapse of Governments and the outbreak of conflict. Preventive activities, however, should not be viewed as a substitute for the right to seek asylum. Successful prevention depended on an effective early-warning system, which should function in close collaboration with UNHCR in order to devise strategies for averting mass displacements.

56. An impartial judiciary and appropriate legislation were essential for protecting human rights in the administration of justice. Hungary welcomed the Office's efforts to assist Governments in strengthening national legal and judicial capacities and incorporating international legal standards relating to refugees into their legislation. Direct human rights monitoring in the field was the most reliable method for anticipating man-made humanitarian problems. The presence of external witnesses might itself deter some abuses. Temporary protection of refugees followed by voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity was the most satisfactory means of solving refugee problems. In that connection, he stressed the importance of voluntary repatriation based on the principle of non-refoulement as established under international law. Refugees should have access to information on the situation in their country of origin in order to be able to decide to return.

57. Hungary welcomed the Office's initiative concerning REFWORLD, a collection of databases which would be a powerful tool in developing refugee policies and supporting operations. His country highly appreciated the important activities of civil society, which was indispensable to efforts to combat xenophobia and racial discrimination. Human rights education was a valuable tool for dealing with such evils. Peace agreements and post-conflict rehabilitation should provide for the principle of respect for minority rights. With regard to the implementation of the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it seemed that the peaceful return and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons would be a longer process, requiring the firm commitment of the international community. In that connection, he expressed appreciation for the noble work by UNHCR in bringing relief to tens of thousands of uprooted people.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.